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THE NOISE THAT TIME MAKES

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THE NOISE THAT TIME MAKES

BY MERRILL MOORE

WITH A FOREWORD BY JOHN CROWE RANSOM

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1929

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To the memory of my father

JOHN TROTWOOD MOORE

and to my mother

MARY BROWN DANIEL MOORE

For the privilege of reprinting certain of the poems in this volume that have previously been published in various periodicals, acknowledgment is made to The Nation; The Saturday Review of Literature; The Sewanee Review; The Fugitive; Poetry, A Magazine of Verse; The Commonweal; Donald Davidson's Book Page (The Nashville Tennesseean); The Stratford Magazine; and The Archive, and to Harcourt, Brace and Company for a few poems from Fugitives, An Anthology of Verse.

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FOREWORD

Merrill Moore is a spontaneous poet, that is, free and easy in his way of generating poems, beyond anybody I know. He is now a young doctor of medicine and twenty-five years of age.

He has written many hundreds of poems. Some were written in shorthand, some on stray scraps of paper, and many have perished that were well worth preserving. For he has been the victim of his own facility in the following manner: He has scarcely been able to keep, copy and revise the old poem because it has always proved easier simply to write a new one.

He was one of the best members of the Fugitive group of poets, who flourished here and published a little magazine of that title some years ago. Another member would bring to the meeting his small stint of poetry, but Moore would bring twenty, thirty, or fifty brand-new sonnets as his exhibit,—more than his time-allowance would let him read. We often thought of a procedure which a consideration for his dignity as well as our own prevented us from carrying out: we wanted to offer pub-

licly to match Moore against the world; we would have locked him and the challenger in a room for a given time, and then compared the poetry which they brought out with them; we knew that Moore would be far in the lead for quantity and we were not uneasy as to the quality.

Before he became of age, and before he started his medical course, Moore was already well established in our minds as a poet. But we were very curious to see what effect the discipline of the medical school would have on his poetic gift; we knew very well how monopolistic are the demands made by medical science upon the mind of the medical scientist. Moore came through quite unscathed; science did not quite get its usual possession over him. His time for writing was curtailed, but when he did write he wrote as readily as ever, and his style was unchanged. The poems in the present volume, for instance, were composed in a good many different years, some of them before he entered medical school; so the learned critic will find it dangerous trying to affix to them a chronology.

Not to do a professional disservice to Doctor Moore, I should state that he took his medical degree with credit

and, though generally known to be a poet, is highly regarded locally as a young physician.

The content of these poems is disconcertingly various. His memory and imagination range so freely that they provide his verse with incessant surprises. And it is an excellent thing to miss consistently the way of the obvious. Still, it is hard to find a fixed purpose and philosophy in such a miscellaneous show. We must not be distressed over this more than we need be. I should think his situation is about as follows: His profession offers him all the opportunity his mind requires to exercise, as Kant would say, "according to principles." His poetics are his holiday; they are serious and wholehearted, but not restrained.

They are not even restrained by the old conventions of poetry; the metrical ones, for example. "Tradition of a Young Poet" is a tradition to which Moore has no objections, and which he is far from having engaged in any conspiracy to oppose. He simply lets it take care of itself. When he is writing poetry, he is not under the influence of any conscious principles; and the thing that saves him then is that which has to save anybody who is not saved by fighting for some fine explicit cause—he

must fall back on his natural good taste. And this taste is doubtless a function of Moore's social background, which is superior. Moore simply expresses his personality, which is rich enough to impress us and please us.

The poems here are in Moore's favorite medium, a fourteen-line unit, tolerably capable of scansion, and variously rhymed. Whether or not they are sonnets is perfectly arbitrary, a matter of definition. Moore has consented to cast his story, scene or character, into this informal sort of sonnet shape, without admitting any other obligation.

His mind lacks so much of having been dulled by a mere literary tradition—the science and routine by which an art perpetually destroys itself—that he pitches his circus tents where he might be most expected to erect solemn fanes. He is evidently not bearing in mind at all what he must have heard about the sonnet during his years of exposure to the courses in English literature: its formal characteristics, for example; or its solemn associations, as for instance that this was "the key wherewith Shakespeare unlocked his heart," or "the trumpet whence Milton blew soul-animating strains," or "from heaving waters of the impassioned soul a billow of tidal

music." He has forgotten all the taboos which ordinarily defend the sonnet from a very spontaneous contemporary use.

It is because Merrill Moore is an inevitable fountain of charming novelties that he has done what I doubt if any other living poet could do; and that is, publish himself fully, delicately, and beautifully in a book composed entirely of sonnets, or quasi-sonnets.

JOHN CROWE RANSOM

Nashville, Tennessee, 1929

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SONNETS OF AMERICAN LIFE

Green Trousdale and Sam Sevier

The deference these old men showed each other
Was a wall of granite it took years to build
Stone by stone and if you stop to consider
That it was no other beast than Time that killed
The lack of respect that once roved free between them
You should not marvel that their eyes were dim
When finally the stone wall was erected
And all the primal errors were corrected.

They were no different then from two locust trees
With a wall between them of stone, one on either side;

Both stretched out their branches to heaven in pride
Giving honey to a thousand bees,

Both shed their old leaves early in the fall
But always between them was the granite wall.

Old Men and Old Women Going Home on the Street Car

Carrying their packages of groceries in particular
With books under their arms that maybe they will read
And possibly understand, old women lead
Their weaker selves up to the front of the car.

And old men who for thirty years have sat at desks
Survey them harmlessly.
They regard each other
As forgotten sister looks at forgotten brother
On their way between two easily remembered tasks
And that is positively all there is to it.

But it was not that way thirty years ago!
Before desks and counters had tired their backs and feet,

When life for them was a bowl of odorous fruit
That they might take their pick of, then turn and go
Saying, "This tastes so good!" or, "This smells so sweet!"

Abschied

And . . . after the dance was over he
Went up to the ones who were sitting in the car
And told them all how much he'd like to be
Invited again and whistled them a bar
Of music from the song he'd liked the best,
The one they played while he had danced and she
Had remarked what everyone wore, how each was dressed;
And they all agreed and laughed contentedly.

But somehow he felt as far away by then
As if instead of the car he peered into
He were a hunter looking into a pit
Where, thick-furred, in the dark were one or two
Fierce bears whose sharp claws tore, whose white teeth bit
The flesh that chanced unarmed to fall within.

Antwort

There are three ways to get your answer to me:

One, loose your pigeons, for they know my roof;
Tie the message on one with a tiny band
And it will bring but will not understand
The words that she who holds herself aloof
Has written on rice paper with black ink.

That is the quickest way to do it, I think,
Others I know, but none as instantly.

Or tie a ribbon on the white swan's neck;
Red for yes and ocean-blue for no,
They pass by here to water.
If they go
Three days unribboned I'll know that you walk
In your rose garden waiting for the Fall
To tell me by blowing dead leaves over my wall.

Public Park: Roué on a Bench

He is an old roué, rather old,
But not too old to fail to recognize scorn
From a young girl not especially interested in gold
But more in youths that consider themselves forlorn.

Young girls have eyes especially for arms that move
Quickly and gracefully about what they do;
Eyes need be fresh, not necessarily blue.

Similar details determine that sort of love
Which the young enact very largely in public parks
Conveniently far from street-lights and their glow
But conveniently near to fountains whose quiet flow
Is enough to float their intimate craft that embarks
On a sea it does not know the meaning of
But is quite content simply to name it love.

How She Resolved to Act

"I shall be careful to say nothing at all
About myself or what I know of him
Or the vaguest thought I have—no matter how dim,
Tonight if it so happen that he call."
And not ten minutes later the door-bell rang
And into the hall he stepped as he always did
With a face and a bearing that quite poorly hid
His brain that burned and his heart that fairly sang

And his tongue that wanted to be rid of the truth.
As well as she could, for she was very loath
To signify how she felt, she kept very still,
But soon her heart cracked loud as a coffee mill
And her brain swung like a comet in the dark
And her tongue raced like a squirrel in the park.

Candidate for High Office in the Land

His name is a long symphony that a thousand men
Have practiced over and over and over again
For many days to make it magnificent
When it is presented in a public place.

His name is that, but such is not his face;
It is a paper bag in which are pent
A wasp, a bee and a butterfly together
Longing to be out in the summer weather.

So, as we hear his high name being played,
We look on his low face and are not dismayed
By the thunderous notes its syllables suggest

And we are assured that the mystic hand knew best
That twisted the neck of the bag so that the bee,
The wasp and the butterfly never should be free.

Old Men

Talking about men who are richer than they are
And telling how things that are might be otherwise
And looking out of the corners of their eyes
Are what old men inordinately like to do,

Men not so old that they have lost all care
For matters they used to pride themselves about
But certainly long since past the finding out
Of whether these matters were or were not true.

And there are some old men who are scrupulously clean
And some who have kept a fragment of the days
That were broken when Time crashed their shelf to the ground,

These old men are neither fat nor lean,
Nor short nor tall; they are distinguishable by the ways
They light their pipes and suddenly turn around.

The Trouble

The trouble with this lady is that she
Will not admire the rose but she will say
"Who planted it?" and learning turn away.

For blackamoors, though suppliant on the knee,
Never appealed to her, even when sublimed
Into lovely rose-plants that they set and tended
Against the seasons' buffetings unended
Through the cold nights when steeple-bells had chimed
Not as cold, though they were made of brass,
As the lady's tongue that would not let feeling pass
From her timid heart whose small doors shut because

The sweetness was removed from a lovely rose
That had been tended by a blackamoor
Rich in roses, otherwise rather poor.

Idiomatische Sprache

"Rather than acknowledge this question as debatable
I would open my tables to your laws
First crying loudly, 'Give me the first cause
And I will answer any question you ask
Bordering honestly on the appointed task,'
But as for those loose ends and worn-out strings,
Cast them among the other outworn things
That cannot even generously be called statable."

Senators were speaking thus and I wondered on
The meaning of such mighty gusts of wind,
For surely the wind means much as it passes by?

Now I discount widely the wind's cry
Hearing it shrilly repeated *the wind has sinned*
And these are the evils that are pondered on.

Mr. and Mrs. Alonzo Sidney

People of that sort seem to attract each other
About as cattle manage to find the clover
That only grows sparsely in a pasture field
And miss the rich black spots of earth that yield
Always the greenest and most luscious grass.

No one can say just how it comes to pass
Any more than one might try to explain how it happens
That breaks occur in fences where gold grain ripens.

They pass each other one day in the street
Without introduction, without fore-knowledge at all

Or they may see each other at a ball
And chance to inquire and the next day they meet.

Then the game begins that takes the rest of their life;
Man and woman, parents, husband and wife.

Lucky Strike

Those who have no agent paid to cry
Their story loudly in the public ear,
To write their names in smoke across the sky
And advertise their moan, applaud their tear
And dwell upon their nature's worthiness
Are fortunate in this:
                it seems that they
Are let to live a little longer than
The uppermost, who are uppermost for a day
But then they see a long descent begin
That terminates in a mystic dismalness
Where old forgotten songs are half-way heard

And unused clothes, bought for children who died,
Lie rumpled on a cold eternal floor
That women sweep, who never swept before.

Aaron Daniel

Aaron is getting old and quicker to feel,
Now than ever before, Winter's approach.

It is no longer a subject that I dare broach
And one that harasses him certainly a great deal
To see the long rows of maples before his house
About the time that grain is stacked in sheaves
Slowly begin to lose their rattling leaves
When the meadows are turned over to the mole and
mouse.

Even his high-stepping horse disdains him now
For Aaron is getting old and his thin calves
Would barely make today respectable halves
Of the ones with which he used to scrape and bow
And dance as steadily as the young ones there
Before the black turned to thin grey in his hair.

Shot Who? Jim Lane!

When he was shot he toppled to the ground
As if the toughened posts that were his thighs
Had felt that all that held them up were lies,

Weak lies, that suddenly someone had found
Out all that was true about them.
It did not seem
Like the crashing of a stalwart forest oak
But like a frail staff that a sharp wind broke
Or something insubstantial in a dream.

I never thought Jim Lane would fall like that.

He'd sworn that bullets must be gold to find him;
That when they came toward him he made them mind
him
By means he knew,
just as a barn-yard cat
Can keep a pack of leaping dogs at bay
By concentrating and looking a certain way.

Undergraduate

He dreamed of lovely women as he slept,
Women with slim white legs and long white arms
And soft round breasts, the two moons of his night.

And as he rolled and tossed on his narrow bed
He dreamed that the arms were slipped beneath his
head,
And under his neck, while women's lovely forms
Like marble urns surrounded him and kept
A silent watch that disappeared when light
Began to tinge the sky and paint the wall
With colors it had never had at all,

And the marble vases that were women where
The dreams had stood were melted into air

And all the arms that had clasped and held his head
Were twisted sheets and feather-pillows instead.

The Anger of Mr. Northcutt

He had the power of throwing an invisible wall
About himself that inclosed him from head to foot,
An impassable partition no one could put
One finger through, were he displeased at all.

The moment any one said the slightest thing
That made his ears point back the slightest bit
That wall appeared, and he, enclosed in it,
Would look out at us as if he scorned to fling
The venom of his eyes in our direction.

It was just as though a great cylinder of glass
Large enough to contain a man were placed
Down over his body, and he was poison-faced
Whenever an incautious word would pass
The lips of those he eyed as for correction.

The Tarver House I

Though the huge house stood empty on the hill
And dark, where dozens of lamps had made windows
flare
Yellowly out on summer and winter air
The nights when all the peoeple were alive
Who used to live there, and though it was still,
Still as when bees are all asleep in a hive,

On certain nights when the wind became too odorous
Or when the rain-beat grew too dolorous

A change occurred within its silent walls
That allowed the ghosts of the dead former tenants
That slept in the walls to slip out into the halls
And the great front rooms and there begin a dance
Till the house was overcrowded;
so many men
And so many women had lived there since eighteen-ten.

The Tarver House II

It was not necessary for the rats and mice
In that house to use the brass locks and keys
As the mortals that dwelt in it had to use,

Keys and rings were far too easy to lose.

There were holes that were large enough to squeeze
Through in an instant, some of them were twice
As large as the largest rat might need to slip
Into if he heard an approaching step

And every corner of the floor-board had
One and two and sometimes a triad
Of places gnawed completely through the door
And through the plaster level with the floor,

Even the edges of the doors were chiselled away
By the teeth of the rats that ran through every day.

Grey Roofs

Under these grey roofs Misery dwells
With an eye that burns and a pointed tooth that gnaws

And for no other apparent cause
Than that the goods she buys and the wares she sells
Can be bought and sold at places conveniently near:

Shops where withered faces are for sale
And stores where young soft hands tell an eager tale
Of hope that never ends and wonder and fear.

These roofs shelter the shops where Misery makes
All the articles she carries in trade,

It is at slight cost that they are made
And very quickly,
Misery only takes
A little while to put this and that together
So it will stand up under all sorts of weather.

Rana Americana

Come join the frogs, they only jump so high,
They do not look for symbols in the sky.

They do not ask for sustenance beyond
What is afforded by their scummy pond.

Wind does not chill them, they thrive in rainy weather;
At night they croak in harmony together.

King-fishers are strong; snakes are treacherous;
But frog-legs are spry; never timorous.

Some of the tribe are known to live in trees,
(For literature, see Aristophanes.)

Students preserve them in formalin in a bottle;
They have been closely watched by Aristotle.

On them subsists a nation as famous as France,
They do not wear collars, belts or pants.

A Lady Is Buried Here

She will not hear the sea where she is laid
Because the sea beats soft too far below.

"High on a hill-side—" was the prayer she made
Just as she turned her eyes away to go
Beyond the limits of her heart's poor strength
Whose pulsing rose and fell as quietly
As sap flows up or leaves drop from a tree
As the life span reaches its final length.

There in autumn fly the faithful rooks
Each year to pick the beech-mast from her ground,

Chattering to themselves, flying round—
They would remind her, I know, of the books
She read when she was an enchanted child,
The hills, the beech-trees, the rooks and all things wild.

Monte Carlo, 11 Septembre

Though Monte Carlo was a place where men
Like him had very little to see or do
John Potts kept wondering if it were true
That this was Monaco.
He took his pen
And sat down in the hotel to write letters
To all his friends whose addresses he could remember
And headed one *Monte Carlo, 11 Septembre*
As the newspaper had it.
He tried to shake the fetters
That thinking in terms of discount and overhead
Had fastened to his ankles, heavy as lead.

He tried to tear a heavy mask away
From his face, his eyelids felt as thick as clay
From sitting eight hours a day in the Kelso Bank
Where the light was poor and the air was always rank.

Bulletins

I saw you walking in the crowded street,
Thousands passed you as you went alone,

And you were young but even then the tone
Of your heels hitting the sidewalk as you passed
Told me that your armies all were massed
To attack with your best defense the enemy
And beat him back and make him blow retreat
And let you ring the bells of victory.

But one by one the men of your army fell;
I heard their names announced in the house of death.

And slowly, slowlier you drew your breath.
Then I read your bulletins that tried to tell
How you might be victorious in the spring
While I knew that they could not mean anything.

And to what high-walled gardens is it that they go
Or to what shuttered rooms that none may see?

Pray not, I beg you not to ask that of me,

For it is a matter about which I know
Not as much as the moles of the gardens above
Or the mice of the shuttered rooms where voices speak
But little else causes the silence to break
Into the pieces of noise that might be called love
If one were cynic enough to examine the faces
Of bright pretty creatures preening themselves before
Mirrors and eagerly listening at the door
For expected steps—
any one of a thousand cases
That all show the same facts true that we lament
As the cause of Weltschmerz, sorrow and malcontent.

Lucia and Louis

Only one autumn, only one autumn ago,
They strolled this road in the hills far over the town,
Watching the autumn sky and looking down
On the smokestacks and roofs cluttering the valley
below.

Then Winter came with his winds, with a wind to blow
The leaves away from the trees on the hill's high crown;
So they ceased their chatting inasmuch as the leaves
were blown
Over the paths of the hillside they used to know.

Only one autumn between them—they used to scorn
Those not like them, who would not walk out the heights,

Who drudged months full in the town, unwittingly torn
Between bread and beauty and the blood and the brain's
cold rights.

But each walks a separate street now in fine stealth
Watching the leaves blow down in the street's black filth.

TRADITION OF A YOUNG POET

It Is Winter, I Know

What if small birds are peppering the sky,
Scudding south with the clouds to an ultimate tip on lands
Where they may peck worms and slugs from moist sands
Rather muddily mixed with salt?
Or if wind dashes by
Insufferably filled with bird's indeclinable twitter
Not deigning to toy with the oak-twigs that it passes
And treading but lightly on all the delicate grasses
Under trees where crickets are silent, where mad leaves flutter?

It is winter, I know, there are too many Nays now confronting
The obdurate soul that would trick itself into believing
That buds are still ripe, that cells are all ready for cleaving;

It can only be winter, winter alone, when blunting
Winds rush over the ice, scattering leaves from their
weeds
To rattle the sycamore tree's bitter shrivelled seeds.

Just Then the Door

Just then the door decided to close itself.
In walked One, in walked Two, in walked Three.

With the door shut it was impossible for that to be,
You say, but they walked right in through the door.

And One sat down cross-legged on the floor
And the second propped himself against the wall
And Three, chiefly because he was so tall,
Sat down on and let his legs dangle from the shelf.

Then they all spoke, first one, then another,
Every one of them distinctly calling me "brother"

And every one smiling in his ghastly way
As if his eyes contradicted what his mouth would say,

And each one disappeared like whirling smoke
Just about the time the morning broke.

And she accepted the gift from him not knowing
That in the heart of the world a seed was growing,
Ready that moment to burst its fibrous shell,
That it would level their house, extinguish the fires,
When it was grown, of their hearth, and mute the lyres
That their shepherds plucked to make them sleep
After strenuous days of herding celestial sheep
On the lonely heaths that separate heaven from hell.

Laughing, he tossed her globe spinning in the air:
"Dearest, what a pretty! Throw it to me!"

The Pacific Ocean spilled in the Indian Sea,
The Great Lakes sloshed about and a thousand trees
Were uprooted and drifted like down on a summer
breeze
Off to the voiceless depths of anywhere.

Helen Told Me What Was in Her Head

It was just about like this, she said:

I was entirely alone in the empty house
And I started thinking this way—suppose a mouse
Or several mice (I fear them very much)
Would think that I was the sort of little girl
That they would like to eat (for you know that there
are such),
That they would eat me and not leave any sign
Of the arms and legs and body that had been mine!

That was how she became so terrified
That when we reached the house and turned on the light
She was living in a province of the land of fright

And had to be taken upstairs and put to bed,
So that her eyes that were a deep shade of brown
Would stare less widely and normally quiet down.

We Are Sleepy Shepherds We

If fourteen lines were fourteen hundred lines,
O then I might begin to start to tell
Matters I have thought about until
Both my eyes ache and my incorrigible brain
Answers my will with, "No, I will not sleep,
I'll guard this flock of thoughts lest one escape
And all the others, hearing the strange whines
The wolf forgetfulness makes, will leap the pen
And follow the lost thoughts into the forest away."

Leaves are so thick there it is hard to tell day
From night and they say that shepherds never can
Tell the dusk hour from the beginning of dawn
If one would awaken after a very deep sleep,
Wondering what may have happened to his sheep.

John's Threat

John, eleven, declares to Evelyn, nine,
"Where is my white rabbit? Have you seen
My white rabbit any time this afternoon?"

"No," Evelyn replies, "I have not been
Near her cage; I have had my balloon
In front of the house playing with a friend of mine."

So it was I happened to overhear
The following typical threat that was childishly queer:

"If I could find one who knows where my rabbit is hid
I would open his head like cook opens up the lid
Of a tomato-can and I would look inside and see
Exactly where he knew my rabbit to be,

And if he acted like he wouldn't allow
It I believe I'd do it anyhow."

They said nothing who had been taught to stand
Patiently by the door where all came in
And wait there all day with an outstretched hand,

They had forgotten how to frown and grin
And had something of the expression babies have
Whose facial muscles timidly await
The command of nerves whose development is late
And what is there is neither bold nor brave.

But those to whom no orders had been given at all
Laughed uproariously enough to split their cheeks,
They had not had, they claimed, so much fun in weeks

And when no one was coming down the hall
Each one looked at the other and said, "Well, well!
What do you think about it! What the hell!"

Now and Then

Courtesy was the predominant note
Struck by his metallic sideward glance
As he asked her if she wanted to dance.

She, aware of the cut of his dinner coat,
Answered yes as a planet might be told
By a curt Creator that it must not remain cold

But, charting its course now by a new set of logs,
Must leave its neighbors, nebulae and fogs
Of distant aether, and begin to take part
In a new universe very dear to the heart
Of the curt Creator who carefully planned such things

Just as he fixed the morning star so it sings
For fools like Donne and Blake to hear in their sleep
While early-birds hop about and earth-worms creep.

I would say "Come in" but he would not come in,
My room was too warm, perhaps, or I had no chair
In which the wind could comfortably sit and be fair
To his own peculiar structure all the while.

No matter indeed, trees have almost the same style
Of paying calls, a neighboring pine tree below
Stands by my window ankle-deep in snow
And only taps when the wind makes too much din.

They are two friends that will never visit me
To sit them down to chat and drink my wine,

The wind, he only rattles on the door,
Whines a moment at its crack along the floor

Then rushes back to embrace the frigid pine
Outside my window who taps for me to see.

The Flies

Death came to him so quickly that the flies
In the room were unaware that he was dead,
Which is usually not the case.
They avoided his head
Strangely enough and did not light on his eyes
At all as flies are very apt to do
When the blood stops to rest and the brittle ribs stop heaving
And the heat goes off while the last breath is leaving
And the work of the lungs and the brain is finally through.

They continued describing circles in the air
Using the light globe to describe a radius,

But toward dusk this must have become tedious
To them, judging from the deliberate care
With which they took it on themselves to stop
And rest for the night over the mantel-top.

Why He Stroked the Cats

He stroked the cats on account of a specific cause,
Namely, when he entered the house he felt
That the floor might split and the four walls suddenly
melt
In strict accord with certain magic laws
That, it seemed, the carving over the front door meant,
Laws violated when men like himself stepped in,

But he had nothing to lose and nothing to win,
So in he always stepped. Before him went
Always his shadow. The sun was at his back.

The ceilings were high and the passageway was so black
That he welcomed the great cats who advanced to meet
him,
The two of them arching their soft high backs to greet
him;

He would kneel and stroke them gently under their jaws,
All that is mentioned above being the cause.

Spotted Hides and Poor-grade Wool

There was a moon, a young one in the sky
And a cold breeze blowing from the upper air
And a rapid creek flowing not far from where
The salt lick was, where all the sheep were bedded
In the white moonlight one could see to read by
Were one a literary shepherd wedded
To printed pastorals instead of the natural ones
Ruled over by sun and moon and stars and seasons.

Shepherds that really cared about their sheep
Would never have left them out of doors to sleep
On such a night as this; they might be bewitched
And grow with spotted hides and poor-grade wool,

Valuable sheep always should be watched
And allowed to breed only when the moon is full.

One remarked, shifting a sharp black fin,
"This was a beautiful boat with its grey paint
And the brass that one time gleamed before the taint
Of salty water turned its gloss to green.

But where are the soldiers we could so plainly see
The times we leaped from the water to hear them shout
At the sight we made tumbling head-first out
To dive back heavily again into the sea?"

"They were here," replied the second one,
"Some days ago, but yesterday at dawn
A school of young sharks scuttled quickly past me
With guilty sideward glances;
I could see
That they were not hungry from the disinterested way
They sniffed at food all the rest of the day."

You Can Never Tell

You can never tell what girls are going to do
Or what boys are thinking about. If you begin
By taking a pin and saying, "This is a pin,"
And hold it up where they can get a view

The girls are just as apt to leave the group
Particularly if they happen to be in love
Or the boys may remark "Look up above!
Watch that aviator loop the loop!"

If they happen to be outdoors talking together
And if it happens to be inclement weather
And the group is indoors listening to some one play
The sort of music not heard every day,

What may occur is unpredictable
And what does occur is quite incredible.

Warning to One

Death is the strongest of all living things
And when it happens do not look in the eyes
For a dead fire or a lack-lustre there,
But listen for the words that fall from lips
Or do not fall. Silence is not death;
It merely means that the one who is conserving breath
Is not concerned with tattle and small quips.

Watch the quick fingers and the way they move
During unguarded moments—words of love
And love's caresses may be cold as ice
And cold the glitter of engagement rings;
Death is the sword that hangs on a single hair,
And that thin tenuous hair is no more than love
And yours is the silly head it hangs above.

Parade

Yes, this must pass, this day and its parade
Of terrifying minutes tramping past
And others yet, for these are not the last.

Days are to be whose serried hours are laid
In fierce brigades across the fields of Time
Waiting the bugle note of circumstance
To give them all the signal to advance
And bring more nameless deeds than one could rhyme.

If you doubt me then look on the sun
Trailing his banner westward through the sky,

This breeze, no doubt, has blown in Araby,
And do you think that bird sings of fresh pain?

How many times, how many times again,
That cloud has fallen as rain on Babylon!

You who are ashes! What I most regret,
I who write, mainly on your account
And what you mean to me, I cannot forget
That though I can remodel all the font
Of what I will, I cannot put the water,
Holy, pure and brilliant, in the bowl
So that it will leap and flow and roll
Over the lips of those who wish for laughter
But have only tears that are too vainly shed
To ever recall the beauty that is dead
That once was yours.
I can recall with words
The house you dwelt in, even, and the birds
That flew over it in spring and in the fall,

But you I cannot ever recall at all.

After the Storm

But a great log had fallen across the road.

There was nothing for us to do but stop and wonder
How to get it away.
The rain and thunder
Were both about to end.
An invisible tree-toad
Was beginning to shrill the interrupted song
It had been singing earlier in the day
Before the clouds, that were now washed away
By the wind and rain, had ever come along
The paths in the sky that were especially prepared for
them
By a Creator whose own name is dim
But whose bright deeds give all the universe light
From crimson planets sinking in their bed
And emerald clusters rising overhead
Of stars that populate the sunless night.

Her Largesse

The kingliest parts of him belonged to her.

He'd given them to her once when she was ill,
Lamely, perhaps, and somewhat against his will.

But now she held them closely like a fur
Robe about her when the winds beat snow
Against her figure that had far to go
Over a road over a hill so steep
Those who reached its end could only sleep;

His long square forehead and his long-lidded eyes,
She held them tightly as a jockey holds
The reins wrapped over his knuckles in double folds
When the wind has beaten his cap down in his face.
And this is perhaps the end of his last race
And to win it would be the key to paradise.

Stop the Parade

Stop the parade and let the feet be still
Between this valley and that distant hill.

Out of the East too long, too far they march
With steady tramp—tramp—tramp. The tongues will parch
And cleave to the roof of the mouth before they stop,
The bones will be dust, the blood will be earth again,
Pain will be pleasure and pleasure will be pain
Before they disappear over the dim hill-top.

Stop the parade—too long, too far already
The feet have tramped, the shoes are worn through and lost
And it is too great to count, the awful cost,
Soldier and gentleman, camp-follower and lady,

You have made your path too long that leads from the womb
In the dark back again through the light to the darkened tomb.

What the Winds Said to Adrian

Adrian . . . Adrian . . . Adrian . . . (the voices
lulled)
Your feet should not go treading where the fawns
Have cropped so closely to the bitter roots
Of the grass. You still march to the sound of lutes
And still unheeding, and you have seen many dawns
Through the vines from which the blooms were pulled
By those who danced so lightly in the sun
They forgot the intricate steps they had begun. . . .

But rest you lightly now till Michaelmas,
Adrian, then we winds will come again
To you and sing to you our song for pain

While our voices blow to the east where shadows pass
After the orange sun has made his will
And is being interred by the clouds beneath a hill. . . .

The Longer I Watch

The longer I watch the heavens I see more stars
Until a certain hour, the break of dawn.

Naturally then of course they all are gone
But after the sun is set and I begin
To sweep the sky with tireless hungry eyes
In silent order one by one come in
Points of light, first slowly, then rapidly
Like guests arriving in a dim room for tea.

Then along midnight as Venus, Jupiter, Mars
And the jewels of the dippers swing across the skies

Strangers appear like famished animals
Whose eyes shine bright in the reflected fires
From the camp of the sun whose long processionals
Are halted underneath me to wait for day.

I Saw You First

I saw you first on a summer afternoon
Watering the lawn with a hose and a glittering jet
Of falling crystals shining in the sun.

On the shaded grass, drenched and soaking wet,
Neighbors might pass and you would answer their call
With a constant voice.
With that same voice I heard
You scold two puppies for romping too much with a ball
Or yapping under the locust tree at a bird.

Then Autumn descended out of her chariot of bronze,
Spring in her silver, Summer in her gold one had left,

And found your asters unready with rusted crowns,
And the puppies both half-grown dogs and you bereft
Of your olden voice, raking the fallen leaves
And snipping the moonflower vines that had grown to
the eaves.

Pandora and the Moon

Minds awake in bodies that were asleep
Caused the winged troubles to be born
That made Pandora one time feel forlorn,

Because, in spite of the box, she could not keep
Her troubles there, the worrisome animalcules
Fluttered out never to be regained,
For every method of evil especially trained
And subject neither to God's nor the devil's rules.

What shall she do? Nothing, sit and ponder,
Watch the dying leaves drop from the tree
Until they all are gone and she may see
The same moon then that used to make her wonder
At the unbelievable stories she sits and reads,

And if she succeeds in that then she succeeds.

Mice in Sheaves

I know when no mice rustle in the sheaves
That Autumn is gone, that when the wind has whirled
The trees' high flags away that we call leaves
But are green banners that the frost has furled,
That Winter must follow and with it the sharp rain
And fierce snow from the clouds to besiege the earth
Till battle is over and singing return again
And then May's smile and April's open mirth.

But I hear no field-mice rustling in the sheaves
And the tall ash-tree has only tattered leaves
And the quail-calls are hushed, all that were ever given,

And the singing is gone and harvested the dreams
And I stay alone watching the evening heaven
Where birds are flying southward in thin streams.

IF I COULD SPEAK

If I Could Speak

If I could speak it would be for a zeal
By which the hills are steep, the sea is deep,
By which sea-gulls sustain themselves in flight
And bright stars climb the fastnesses of night,

Zeal that bred and colored newt and eel,
Serpent and dragon, man and ant and flea,
The sweet arbutus and the acorn tree,
Zeal that penetrated Zephyr's mouth
To let a soft wind blow out of the south—

That glassy mountainside is hard and steep,
But borrow the zealous claws of the wolf to climb,
It is cold there even in the day-time
On those heights that zeal will take you to—
But borrow the wolf's coat, do what the wolf would do.

Too Large by Day, Too Small by Night for Us

The world by day is enormous. We are tiny
Spots that dot the turf or at times the briny
Sea with our swimming pates; we are small specks
That pollute the air from which we break our necks
As we fall in flaming planes. We are the robe
Of born and dying mortals that contains
All that is left of Erda's poor remains;
By day the world is large, untimorous.

But at night the world shrinks down, decreases size;
It becomes a circle of light around a fire,
A halo around a candle or a globe.
Outside lies fear, the dark and ominous
Unknown, the large, the danger, the monstrous
Image craven and the visage dire.

"S.S. Carobel"

Ships cost dollars, pounds, marks, lire, francs,
And weigh stone, tons and kilos, sail knots, miles,
Between the coasts of countries, sink, burn, rust,
Wear out, are bought, sold, lost, and carry men
To and from the hearts of waiting women,
Elicit at the dock cheers, tears and smiles,
Obey the waves' whim, follow the winds' pranks,
By surge and tide and swell are rocked and tossed

But is it not unbelievable and strange
How now this faëry vessel can depart
Out of such haven for a distant mart
Skimming and cleaving so miraculously
The foamy meadows of the noisy sea,
Is it not unbelievable and strange?

You Tell Me Morning

Now, if dawn were no more than what you smile
At me—still it would dawn and morning sun
Would rise as easily as both your eyes
Unlid themselves as you look up at me
Unmercifully and yet compassionately,

It would still dawn and sunrise all the while
You hold me in the chambers of your eyes,

It would still day—you are the only one
To make such miracle without surprise,
To make such miracle and then apprise
Me quickly of its making with your eyes

That rise deep-lidded, greet me with a stare
To tell me sun and morning are both there,
I who alone would never be so wise.

Yes, You Might as Well

You might as well be ready now as ever
To accept the gift of which Time is the giver
Par excellence—and you may call this prose
And smile and say, "I wonder if this man knows
That what he is saying has been said before
And better by better men." Yes. One time more
However I cry, "Mortality, you are Man."
Which was old before you started or I began
To look over printed pages with curious eyes,
And say, "This one is a fool—that one is wise,"
Critically, ephemerally, until
You are the man shot dead across the sill
Of the door to the house of life you thought was yours
Until another tenant made it his.

Sleepy Water

Have you ever slept—slept like a water-fall
Falling somewhere over a stony ledge
Into a pool of slumber far below—?

Have you ever fallen in sleep, fallen below
The margin of this world, below its edge
Into something nebulous and slow
Like the Milky Way of sleep? Did you ever fall
Insistent, ceaseless, like a water fall
Over the bed you slept on—did you drop
Into the Gulf Stream of sleep and never stop
Sinking, dissolving into sleep—did you
Ever do what I'm trying to tell you to
Do—drop—fall—sink—slip away—dissolve
Into the water of sleep, the water of sleep?

How simple mathematics is applied!
How happy, helpful, fortunate it is!

One is a number, millions are mysteries;
I is I, *x* is the race of Man
That dignifies itself with lust and pride
And has continued so since time began
Progressing along strict mathematical lines
From Past through Now to what the Future divines.

And letters! See the orderly alphabet,
A B C, and so on, like birds on a wire!

And they fly up and settle down again, but yet
No water nor flame has quelled their heat and fire;
All the words in the world out of twenty-six
Letters for us to re-arrange and fix.

Night Is Filled With

The sleepless aged or their weary dreams,
Their shrivelled hands and shrunken-lidded eyes,
Silent vigils through the lonely night,
The howling wind and footsteps in the dark,
The rafter-creak, the cock-crow or the bark
Of a distant dog, the murmur of green leaves
Or faces peering into the still air
Through blank windows, the thin flame that weaves
Shadow-carpets by the street-lamp's glare,
The monotone repeated by the streams
On hidden gravel-beds, the tremulous wise
Cold cries of owls, the scampering in fright
Of mice across dry attics, dusty floors,
The screeching hinge and the bang of wind-closed doors.

O Mad Spring, One Waits

O mad spring that taught the silent grass
To die for winter, spring that taught the sun
Its quick commandments, winds of spring that run
Before the months of summer, O mad spring
That forces icicle and frost to pass,
That taught the savage trees to stand and call
With a green cry that echoes until fall,

Spring that does not heed the signalling
Colors of my desire, O spring, one waits
And envies seasons and their certain fates,
Drawing pitiless and tiring breath,
Watching shadows from the sun of death
Darken as its light pales, one still stands
Pressed by fear and hunger on both hands.

For the Strange Children

Have you food for your hunger? Are there shoes
On your feet? A shelter over your head?
When you are weary do you have a bed
To go to? Is there a fire in your house?
Lonely? Another heart to unburden with,
Another one to tread the silent path
Leading from yesterday into tomorrow
Lined with grass of grief and trees of sorrow?

Then you do not need what I would give
If you have all—I sing for the lonely ones,
Brave fingers cut by thorns, feet bruised by stones
Whose salvage is the fragments they would save
Out of the gathering wrecks that strew this shore,
This strange cold strand they never saw before.

Memory

Memory is a warm bath that dissolves
The scabs of pain and hunger from the mind.

Memory lets the past be pleasant and
Memory lets the unhappy soul be blind
To evils that have walked abroad the land.

Memory, after the hunt, gives to the selves
Their equal portions of the fickle quarry
That Hand or Face have captured.
Memory
Never lets the consciousness miscarry
What is due as duty to Memory.

Memory, when happy, is the last
Part of the person to dread turning sorry.

Memory is the path that you may take
To see the living unborn, the dead awake.

When he was young the satyrs came and stole
Him from his duty shepherding fat sheep
And took him to a grotto where a sleep
Fell on him. And there he slept the whole
Winter through and never dreamed or waked
Except for thirst that never had been slaked
For white and purple wine in the oak casks
Filled by the satyrs as their yearly tasks;

He waked and drank the wine, then slept again
How many days he did not know but when
He rose and thought at last he could not tell
How much time had passed or what befell
Him in that grotto where there only were
Emptiness and shadow and thin air.

Attributes of the Night Sky

Night is a hill that not only the stars
Climb to a zenith then descend with awe;

We too answer that impervious law
To praying, tears and laughter; we obey
That code of alternates, night versus day,

We too ascend to midnight then to dawn
Descend before the last pale star is gone
Or withered behind the glowing sunrise bars.

We climb the hill of night; its crest is not
Exactly on the twelve but nearer three
O'clock. Then are children born and on the sea
Ships go down and nothing marks the spot;
Silently the dying die, then even
Space and Time do not pertain to heaven.

Fish at Night

The way fish swim in a phosphorescent sea
Viewed from the prow of a boat has now become
So much a wonder that it cannot be
Very far from the millennium
Of wonders; jasper, onyx, obsidian,
None are as dark and hard, as cold and smooth
As is the water's surface except where waves
Swell and dash and break against the prow
That cuts the water like a plow and shaves
The surface of its foam.
Deep in it now
Dart swift fish like magic—and in truth
No tongue could tell how swift, with what disdain
They dart away and outward from the prow
As it comes near, no prophet could tell how.

Mother Earth

You are a strange mother, Mother Earth:
Never failing when your children call
Yet never heeding when they cry at all,
O paradoxical mother!
If a dearth
Would fall on them it would be out of you,
Yet is never annalled what you do
Though in the midst of immanent new crises
You never cease to shower with surprises
Out of your lap your children that petition
Help and forgiveness.
Loyalty, sedition,
All are equal, both are ever the same
That you produce to carry and tread on your name;

You have produced us all and will receive
Us all on a day we do not dare to grieve.

That name will not be borne away by wind.
Whatever his burden is wind cannot blow
It from his shoulders; he must rise and go
As men have always gone in the rough wind
That tears from some men many useless vestures
But never this one's attitudes and gestures.

The wind can never tear away the fame
That is his special burden; the long name,
Futile denomination, fearsome nomenclature
Of destiny that is his destiny:

The wind may mutter tremolo and whinny
Persuasively—the burden will not fall.

O fardel! From what source derives your nature
That is this man's full nothing, empty all?

Monotonous, the Needless Endless Words

He said the words, no more. He only said
The words. They flowed like water from a tank
Or cistern of rain water that had stood
A long time since its filling and grown stale,
Flat like warm rain water in a pail.

He said the words; no one would ever quail,
Obey or fear his orders—no one shrank
Or leaped to execute what he had bid;

He said the words. They flowed like rotten water
Out of a tepid vessel: not one sad
Or joyous grimace helped them—not one mad
Gesture or quick beckon helped the water
His words were flowing. Now, is there then no
End to these dull words that come and go?

Something: Man

There is something about a man that makes
A woman attentive when his voice speaks,

Something about a man makes a woman stop,
Survey his figure from the foot to top,
Cap-a-pie. There is something about a man
That melts the crystals of the coldest woman:
Diamonds by moonlight—they are she—
That fuse in his fire of masculinity.

Femininity is no and man is yes,
Man is go, woman is always stay,
Man tomorrow, woman is yesterday,
Man is a fact and woman is a guess;

Let the woman negate the world who can
Or deny the positivity of a man.

Something: Woman

Something about a woman makes a man
Stop, become aware, look and listen.

Men dissolve in air but crystallize
Out of solution when a woman's eyes
Focus on them. When a woman turns
And looks at a man a fraction of him dies
That should not have been born; the lonely beast
Starves for lack of food on which to feast.

He sees the cup filled ready for him to drink,
He sees the thought formed ready for him to think,
In his head there is a light that burns
Brighter and shines out under his eyelids

When a woman stares at him and sees
More than many speechless mysteries.

Dawn Thoughts Before a Busy Day

Somewhere a clock was striking, indicating
The passage of time—what was time? He had never
Seen time though he had heard of its spell
That bloomed men out and dried them up until
Their bodies were wisps to blow to heaven or hell
According to the wind—was time the wind?
Wind that could be felt as well by the blind
Who could not see it as by the well that could?

And was there any purpose now in stating
If ever there was, whether evil or good
The passage of time turned out to be or how
Time passed the past, turned it into the now,
The now into the future and so on—
Somewhere a clock was striking. It was dawn.

Where Are the Days of Seeking Now

The days that so austere attended us
Upon our imminent search that yielded nought,
Where are they now that stood like sentinels
Over our path? Suns dawned, suns sank, and they
Ushered the day out, ushered in the day
Ominously, officially, and we,
Staid and sedate, walked by them as the bells
Of high search pealed importantly somewhere
And broke their music in the crystal air
To scatter it benignly on our heads.

Where are they now, those days through which we
fought
Seriously, preserving patiently
Our efforts that perhaps a trove tremendous
As our searching would reward our deeds?

There is no great unfitness that the pearls
Of life should be cast down before the swine
Of death. Whoever stubbornly declares
That dust is an unjust and lawless end
For all, is wrong and only to defend
This hope I offer signs, slight slender signs
As difficult as the flavor in rare wines
To detect—signs difficult to name,

That lurk in the dress of nature and the same
In the gear of earth, and in the noise
Made in their play by the celestial boys,
Heard in the voices of the fairy girls
That live in trees and rocks, and in the whine
Of comets, shooting stars and meteors.

Now with Colors Far too Fanciful

Now with colors far too fanciful
The aged autumn trees are decked and draped.

A volleying wind but recently has scraped
The sky of summer tint and in the lull
That follows autumn's slow inauguration
Messages from winter are received:

The latest trees must be at last unleaved,
That is the worst, most final proclamation
That issues from cool cylinders of clouds
Above our eyes, eyes that are turned to heaven.

Soon will winter with more somber dyes
Change the shades of hill and meadow even
To a still duller hue than the raw clods
That fill the soil's uncharted vacancies.

City Lunch Hour

Toward noon the hot sun baked the pavement brown
In the red, weary city. Buildings rose
By thousands into the air like strange steel trees—
Weird forests of stone by daylight—and men ran
And shouted in all directions, even those
Who would walk or be silent, even these
Who would not so, and motors rumbled by
Jarring the earth and shaking the warm sky.

In a terse moment Jack went into the street,
Crossed a corner, stopped a pause and breathed
And watched a face the sunlight had just wreathed
With a yellow glow, then as a thousand feet
Trampled by, not without perceptible shock,
He went in a store and bought a dollar alarm clock.

Village Noon: Mid-day Bells

When both hands of the town clock stood at twelve
Eve ceased spinning, Adam ceased to delve.

A lusty cockerel crowed that noon had come,
The shadows stood beneath the trees and some
Were motionless a moment—then the people
Busied themselves for food and in the steeple
Ubiquitous pigeons roucoulayed and slept
Above the watch the dogs below them kept
For nothing—or a dust cloud down the road
That might mean feet or might mean wheels or not.

Then as the noon sun with its ardor glowed
On man and beast and field and dwelling place
The hands moved past noon to another spot
And Time moved on a little way in Space.

ACIDS, BASES AND SALTS

Poet

Why do you, whenever you are addressed,
Dash your brains out, sir, all over the floor?
Against the wall or against an open door
As if you suddenly felt that you were pressed
By impolite circumstance to act that way?

Are you not aware that if you were dead
Hordes of swallows would still fly overhead
Twittering while they blackened the unfortunate day
That you have not yet decided may have to occur
Without your intervention while you dream
In blackened gardens where white peacocks scream
And you are dust that cannot interfere
With others, who perhaps like you will insist on crushing
Their fragile skulls out of which their brains come
rushing?

Young Men

Why is it that young men never succeed?

Various reasons, voices behind the stars
Whisper against them while comets sent as spies
Burn and blind the chambers of their eyes
With bright comet-tails and glowing comet-dust;

Then, outside of that I know there must
Be other reasons why they are put behind bars
And given only the meagerest food they need,

Other reasons we can never know,
Inscrutable causes, possibly arteries and veins
That fail to nourish properly young men's brains
So that the cells there wholly fail to grow
And let them know that voices back of the stars
Are not enough to keep them behind bars.

Carrion

If it should ever be correctly determined
How the Cyclops came to have only one eye,

Then let the ones whose cause it has been to cry
Their own foolish story about it to men who are ermined
And maced and throned and armed with scepter and
crown,

Let those absurd ones be given time enough
To see their condition grossly and in the rough
And then be shown water deep enough to drown
Their lugubrious bodies in, that have long been cadaver-
ous
But so well perfumed and attired that it could not be
told,

For if they do not, when they grow really old,
Vultures and crows who are very hard to fool
May come and seize them, screaming and mutinous,
And carry them off without writ or protocol.

They would accept the flesh but cannot trust it,
It having been known to decay so many times
As poets have told in thousands of feet of rhymes
Feeble as this, lamenting the fall of the rose,
The soot on the snow, the taint of brine in the sea,
The smirching of the lily, the down-cut tree,
The crumbled house, the wall with a gap in it,
The sunken ship, the cloud dissipated by wind,
The speck in ointment, the flaw in the crystal heaven,
The key without a lock, the lock without a key,
The soured wine, the bread baked without leaven,
The meat defiled, killed by one who sinned,
The paradise where the fruit of all knowledge grows
To be eaten by others but not by you and me.

Fire

Call the fire engines out! Turn the hydrants on!
Unhook the chemical carts! Let the water run!

Because a heart is burning in that house
Though it is as quiet as a mouse
And though the blinds are all drawn tightly shut.

Do not ponder now that the cause is what
You think the cause to be, but scream alarm
So that he can hear it whose hand and arm
Set fire to the heart that burns within!

He who has no cognizance of his sin
And will only greet with apathetic stare
The earth and sea and sky, the land and air,
And watch a butterfly glitter as it flits
About in the gutter where everybody spits.

On the Grand Tour 1638-1639

Milton said, I saw the golden chain
Almost with my own eyes but not quite,
I could see it far off and the light
With which it glowed penetrated my brain,
It held the earth suspended in chaos there
Out of hell's reach, attached to heaven's floor,
That was after the mutinous angels had fallen down
From Peter's village to Lucifer's teeming town.

Galileo answered, Yes, so Ptolemy thought.
For one of his day he knew as much as he ought.
I feel that the sun no longer circles us
If it ever did—it's not that generous,
We move about it and as to where the rain
Spills from I don't know nor the golden chain.

Ratiocinatio Religiosi

If you need the words ask for them
And they will fall to you straight from Jesse's lips
Or open the Book to any page by chance
And there before you (marvellous circumstance)
You will find the wind that other ships
Than yours have blessed for wafting to quiet water,

Or go to a room where the atmosphere is stiller
Than where you work, where the air is dim,
And touch whatever you will there with your hand,

Whatever it is, read it and understand
That the everlasting mercy is everlasting
And yours to share no matter how devastating
Are the brutal days that advance armed with sharp
spears
And keen-edged swords against the heart that fears.

Books and Men

Millions of people talking about other people
In book-shop talk and literary reviews,
Passing gossip, criticism, trade-news

Like church organs whose chimes are set in the steeple
To scatter down when crowds congregate within
The battle cries of unknown soldiers lost
In wars lamenting the ultimate gain and cost
Of whether the right were good and the evil were sin
And who did just what thing in just what way,

Millions of people talking about themselves
In millions of volumes dusty on millions of shelves

And everywhere dust, settling down and grey
On faces that might have shown white in the bright
moonlight
Somewhere once, perhaps on a certain night.

Harvest

Smoke your pipe, sir,—smoke your grey pipe,
Smoke your pipe till its rings surround the moon
And make of the moon a Saturn, it will be soon
When all shall know that your head will never be ripe
For plucking into a basket along with the others
That are early or late ripe as the case may be
And are already plucked or shaken off the tree,
They that started out to be your brothers.

Smoke your pipe. Grind the tobacco in your fist,
Look over your glasses as if you knew it all,

You who know nothing, no, you do not know the call
By which wild geese commune, the last with the first,
Over dead waters and sterile prairie lands
Where hunters wander, shot-guns in their hands.

The Ruby Flood

Though ink evaporates and wears away
Words that are written in blood will never fade
But will last as long as the tough paper will last
That holds them there together.
Let the day
That will be unable then to decipher the code
That we write in take heed at what has passed
In cities that dry and rot now in the sun,
Pergamum, Krokodilopolis, Babylon.

For all they need to note is that the word
Their eye beholds is written in red blood
Turned black by time, for surely they have heard
Of the wasteful way that silly lovers have
Of borrowing penfuls of the ruby flood
Flowing from their heart, to be known beyond the grave.

Answers Are in the Back of the Book

This is the reason that we have so little
Now that so many others have so much:

It was agreed by the ultimate factors who
Determine that cats shall mew and lions shall roar
That we be accorded only this jot and tittle
We have and not one item for subtraction

For if it were not so, answers might not be true
In the everlasting text-book of addition

And it might be said by loose-tongued angels or devils,
"God does not figure correctly as he should."

Or, "That is only one of the several evils
That twists the straightness of the heavenly Good
That is supposed to be projected as a straight line
From one point, God's heart, to another point, mine."

Arbor Vitae

Plato himself knew what most men now know
About this round globe that we live upon,

And about its clients the stars and its patron the sun
And its dead relatives covered with aether and snow
That slowly spin down the oblivious years
To planet grave-yards whence no sphere returns
No matter how its obdurate center burns
To rotate and whirl along with the other spheres.

And there are men, the Platos of today,
Who scan printed pages with spectacled eyes
To vision there an eugenic paradise

Where neither too much work exists nor play
And all men are just what each one should be;
Proper leaves and roots nourishing the tree.

Man Who Could Not Tell When It Was Going to Rain

When it was going to rain did he look at the sky
And remark, "It's getting hazy over there."

"The sun's still shining but I rather fear
We're due a lot of rain this time of the year."

"Although today is warm and the weather's fair
The clouds are massing, they're not riding high
And passing over as they do when it's going to be dry."

"I think I'd better go back into the house and try
To find my new umbrella, the one of silk."

No, friend, no, ah, no, he would not do that;
Out he would dash, wearing his best suit and hat,
Cleaned and pressed, he would not look at the sky,

He'd jabber, "Will it rain today, it's very dry?"
And later a rain-storm would break and clabber the milk.

Nevertheless, one who claims such things
Must have recourse to lamps or wishing rings
That bring with a rush out of spaces behind the moon

Gifts that we should never possess so soon
That we forget their nature and the cause
Of our having them and how many unworded laws
Had to work together to bring them to us
From the immemorial home of the incubus
And the succubus adolescents dream about
When lessons are over and classes are turned out,

The monster that often lurks in groves of trees,
Who never mentions any of the things he sees
And if accosted by courageous souls
Turns into dew and filters down worm-holes.

On the Development of Certain Personalities

People like that develop much as sea-shells
Of curious shapes slowly come into being,
So slowly there is never any seeing
How it is done, but a slight incident tells
How much they are different, if you knew them before
Particularly,
once, for example, they were thus:
A single whorl or two, no nucleus,
But now they are elaborate monstrosities
Small and unrecognizable except at the core
Which is invisible.
He only sees
Who remembers stage by stage how they became,
From namable forms, forms without a name,

Now ground by the ocean against an unending shore
To become the same particles they once were before.

Those who had been beautiful never could bring themselves
To admit that they were no longer so as they lay
Carefully sealed in lead from the light of day,
Silently dark in vaults on burial shelves,

But those who had been hideous in every way they knew
Were able to smile and remark, "Perhaps it's true
That we who were second missed nothing by not being first
And what we are through with may be considered the worst
Without admitting that Life is an empty pan
A fool beats on with a bone and if he can
Dents through,
and if anyone lives who feels
That it is not Time but innate Death that steals
The teeth away from the gums and the hair from the head
Then so might he, just as we all, be dead."

Liquids

Liquids we use have always seemed to me
Stranger even than what we use them for,

Ink is an instance, uncork it with care,
It is astounding when you suddenly see
Words formed of it spread on an empty page
That was only paper before it met the ink
And to know that from it unborn men may drink
The sweet or bitter thought of a perished age.

One may consider, though one may forget,
Mysterious humours of the most daily kind;

Milk, out of which the shapes of our bones are laid,
Or drugs that cut the cords in Memory's net
Allowing the fish-like thoughts to escape and hide
In the thin streams that trickle through the mind.

Fear Analysis

Reduce your fears in an ultimate analysis, sir.
What do they equal then?
Answer me that
In as careful terms as with which you buy your hat
Or select a necktie out of seventeen more

And what now camps in the valleys of your brain
Will put out its fire and slip away and you
Who it seems have never known just what to do
Will look in your mirror and find that you are sane.

Boil your fears in hot acids in your mind,
Bake them with alkalies, grind them with coarse earth,

Dissolve, distill what is left; you will have a dearth
Instead of the old plenty but you will find
That the residue steeped in water makes a drink
That is pleasant to sip when one must sit and think.

Waiting for the Earth to Cool

The first time I came the earth was a liquid globe
Of fire whirling somewhere out in space
That glowed so fiercely I had to turn my face
Away, there was not any protecting robe
Of misty clouds above to help keep me cool;

So I went back to where I had been before
And said, "I'll wait a million years or more,"
Which I did, "Until that nebula-like pool
Of burning star-dust cools enough for me
To rest a while there as I have always planned."

I came again and found the forests spanned
With fabulous monsters that hung from tree to tree,

That meant another wait, so I went away
And now return; this time I think I will stay.

The Book of How

After the stars were all hung separately out
For mortal eyes to see that care to look
The one who did it sat down and wrote a book
On how he did it.
It took him about
As long to write the book as to do the deed
But he said, "It's things like this we mostly need."
And the angels approved but the devils screamed with laughter
For they knew exactly what would follow after.

For somehow he managed entirely to omit
The most important facts in accomplishing it,

Where he got the ladder to reach the stars
And how he lighted them, especially Mars,

And what he hung them on when he got them there
Eternally distant and luminous in the air.

Scientia Vincit Omnia?

Salts were formed by acids combined with bases
Under proper conditions, that was easy to see.

He was acid, also easy, but she . . .
A weak base only to be used in certain cases
To unite with an acid that was rather weak?

He was not sure. It seemed as though she was
But he was never sure of it because
He never could quite bring himself to speak.

So laboratory—laboratory—laboratory—
On it went, three days out of six,
Chemicals here, chemicals there,—do they mix?

The ancient characters acting the ancient story,
And just as sure as young birds learn to sing,
Love in a test-tube he knew was a dangerous thing.

Men Have Died

Men have died—worms have eaten them
But not for love? Swear that this is true
And all the birds that are fated to be blue
By reasons known only to God's secretary
Will bring dead leaves and help us both to bury
The overgrown grief that lost its diadem
And its mace and even its royal signet ring
The moment its throne crumbled and the thing
That caused all this to happen took its place.

Without a doubt the color on your face
Means merely that this may or may not be true?

Nevertheless, all I say to you
I mean, for I know that ultimately Death
Will come and steal away even my own breath.

He was their dream but he has been bought and sold
So many times that the patina is lost
And now is tarnished in spite of the first cost
That gilded him with gold that was more than gold,
More than the dazzling metal that men seek
In all the mountains and valleys of the earth.

So many hours have passed now since his birth
From the original source, that he is weak
And has not now the charm that anciently
Drove daemons into aether and dragons into the sea
Before his bitter force and subtle strength.

Now he is battered and tired and lies at length
Prone in the dust of the crowded market place
And dares let no man look upon his face.

What if the winds sang softly the whole night long
On the wet beach wandering slowly up and down,

What if the winds there sang so loud a song
That the waves were hushed, waves that were loud and
strong
And older than the wind, waves stronger grown
Being closer to earth.
Winds might swing over a town
But the face of the earth the waves would finger long
After the winds were asleep and the sun was down.

What if the winds and the waves sung? I cannot tell you
Other than that they both themselves once lulled me
To sleep in the sea-grass beside a cold salt sea

Under a sky that was brilliant with stars and blue
With the justifiable expectation of dawn
For the sun was a long time set and its glow was gone.

Unending, Ceaseless, Interminable

When the last debt is paid and the last
Obligation fulfilled and the last
Duty executed and the last
Promise is complied with and the last
Wish is accomplished as well as the last intention,

When everything is done that one can mention
And all is arranged and in order and nothing remains
To be attended to by hands or solved by brains,

Then, only then, you are ready to begin.

Out of your loins flow seeds that cry for more
Life, work, wealth, love and trouble,

Men and women, they may meet with double
What you know; win all there is to win,
For the next generation it all remains and more.

The Noise That Time Makes

The noise that Time makes in passing by
Is very slight but even you can hear it,
Having not necessarily to be near it,
Needing only the slightest will to try:

Hold the receiver of a telephone
To your ear when no one is talking on the line
And what may at first sound to you like the whine
Of wind over distant wires is Time's own
Garments brushing against a windy cloud.

That same noise again but not so well
May be heard by taking a small cockle-shell
From the sand and holding it against your head;

Then you can hear Time's footsteps as they pass
Over the earth brushing the eternal grass.

This book may be kept
FEN DA

March 26, 193